

# **April 1, 2005 - Prison Tails Program At Westville**

Prison Tails Program at Westville Gives Dogs a New Lease On Life

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In the fall of 2004, Westville Correctional Facility introduced "Prison Tails", a dog rescue and obedience endeavor in cooperation with the Mixed Up Mutts, Inc. of NW Indiana. The philosophy of this marriage is to rescue shelter dogs, deemed unacceptable for adoption. Two offender/dog handlers work exclusively with their assigned dog to make the dog attractive to would be adopters by teaching basic obedience and providing socialization. So far, the program has rescued 10 dogs and the adoption rate has exceeded everyone's expectations; eight of the ten "Prison Tails" dogs have been adopted out to loving families

MONGO, Indiana -- With four dogs, three cats and other critters roaming her backcountry property near Mongo in LaGrange County, it's obvious. Lindy Goetz's love of animals is fetching.

For three decades, Goetz has helped organize animal rescues, shelters, foster/adopt projects, therapy groups and rehabilitation programs to benefit family-challenged dogs and other pets in LaGrange County. In 2001, Goetz met kindred spirits in animal devotees, LaPorte residents Cris and Sarah Stevens.

The Stevenses operate an Indiana nonprofit animal welfare organization called "Mixed Up Mutts." The group rescues strays scheduled for euthanasia in animal shelters, then arranges foster homes and adoptions.

In the fall of 2004, Mixed Up Mutts and Westville Correctional Facility teamed to create the "Prison Tails" program.

The Stevenses didn't have a "ruff" time finding a head trainer -- Goetz easily became leader of the pack. It's a treat for Goetz to be head trainer, a volunteer job with rich personal rewards. She's a certified evaluator and trainer with Therapy Dogs International and American Kennel Club Canine "Good Citizen" program.

Prison Tails runs 10 weeks and teams two screened cellmates with one stray dog for training and TLC. After classroom training for inmates who will become trainers, inmates nurture dogs to be at ease around people and to be handled on and off leash.

The animals are housebroken, trained to respond to hand and voice obedience commands, and often become candidates for American Kennel Association's Canine Good Citizen certification, Goetz said.

"It is a win-win situation," said Goetz. "Animal benefits, inmates benefit, the institution benefits and the adopting family gets a well-trained pet. Training lessens the possibility dogs will be returned to shelters because of poor behavior.

"These animals are not alone in getting a new lease on life. Inmates have told me the program has touched their hearts and gives them a second chance as well," Goetz said.

Westville inmate Larry Evans said, "Emotionally, I've grown attached to the dogs I have cared for. If only they could talk. I can only imagine the abuse and neglect they have suffered."

Evans believes the program is good for him and the dogs. "Mentally, I have changed for the better. I took a deeper look at my inner self and I see a better understanding of the words 'responsibility,' 'compassion,' 'patience' and 'unconditional love.'"

Evans said he's proud of using his time at Westville to rescue a dog from being put down.

Cris Stevens also believes Prison Tails is a win-win program. Offenders learn skills and the program occupies their otherwise idle time. Stevens said inmate positions of caring for and training dogs are highly coveted by the prison population, so participation in the program is used as an incentive for good behavior.

Mixed Up Mutts and Westville Correctional Facility want to partner with an area trade school and expand the program to include on-the-job training certification for inmates who complete the canine training course.

"Inmates could study to be veterinarian assistants, professional dog handlers, obedience trainers or veterinarian technicians," Goetz said.

"This would give them a skill to use when they get out (of prison)." Ed Buss, Westville Correctional Facility superintendent, said, "Mixed Up Mutts group has given us the opportunity to offer an outstanding program to offenders at no cost to taxpayers. Pairing up our AKC 'Good Citizens' graduates with local families is a great example of our willingness and ability to give back to the community."

## **Additional Information:**

### **The Details**

Upon "graduation," Prison Tail dogs are fully obedience trained, spayed or neutered, have all their shots and are housebroken and ready for a family. There are adoption fees for Prison Tail and non-Prison Tail

dogs. Mixed Up Mutts, Animal Welfare Association and Caring Critters are nonprofit organizations and welcome gifts of animal care products, pet food, doghouses, foster homes, adoptive families and financial contributions. In 1998, Lindy Goetz co-founded Animal Welfare Association in LaGrange County; more than eight years ago, Goetz founded Caring Critters.

**Mixed Up Mutts Inc.**

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